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ABSTRACT

At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Latvians were only 52 percent of the total population of Latvia, and official use of the Latvian language had greatly diminished while Russian had become the dominant language. It took 15 years to develop the legal instruments necessary for stabilizing the official status of the Latvian language while complying with internationally accepted human rights norms. The law in its current form is clear and functional, although there are certain difficulties in implementation. Not all of those who are required to know Latvian at the necessary level are in compliance. This report presents information on: (1) "Education Law"; (2) "Law on Citizenship"; and (3) "Incorporating the Concept of Integration into the State Administration System." The paper notes that although the law helps establish the official position on language, in a democratic society, all people can converse in private as they wish. There is no threat from the Latvian government regarding the assimilation or "Latvianization" of ethnic minorities. (SM)

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Dr. Aija Priedite

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[The Evolutionary Process of Laws on the State Language, Education, and Naturalisation: A Reflection of Latvia's Democratisation Process

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0. Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union left Latvia in quite an unusual situation. As a result of Moscow's longstanding policies on industrialisation and russification, the demographic situation in Latvia had changed so much that in 1989 ethnic Latvians were only 52% of the total population. Latvians were becoming a minority in their own land. Things were even worse with the Latvian language. Even though it was possible to obtain an education in the Latvian language during the Soviet period, highly qualified employment positions and doctor's degrees were only accessible by using Russian. In the course of 45 years, the official use of the Latvian language gradually diminished and Russian became the dominant language in all areas.

Table 1 shows changes in the demographic situation in Latvia since 1935:

Nationality	Year			
	1935	1959	1979	2000
Latvians	77.0	62.0	53.7	57.8
Russians	8.8	26.6	32.8	29.6
Byelorussians	1.4	2.9	4.5	4.1
Ukrainians	0.1	1.4	2.7	2.7
Poles	2.5	2.9	2.5	2.5
Lithuanians	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.4
Jews	4.9	1.7	1.1	0.4
Gypsies	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Tatars	-	0.1	0.2	0.1
German	3.3	0.1	0.1	0.2
Estonians	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1
Other	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.8

Source: Occupation regimes in Latvia in 1940-1956: research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia (2001); Riga, 2002; p.422

After "perestroika" and renewed independence in 1991, the new Latvian nation was concerned with securing and strengthening the official status of the language. Three laws were the main driving forces of the process: State Language Law, Naturalisation Law, and Education Law. By tracking the evolution of this legislation and analysing the impact on society, an interesting picture develops. All three laws have undergone radical changes that not only bring them into closer compliance with international requirements, but also reflect the democratisation process of the nation.

The first question one asks is, are these laws in Latvia even necessary? Let us begin with the Language Law. Research of the legislative process and related documentation reveal the repeated use of words and phrases such as: the Latvian language must be protected, its functions must be broadened and strengthened, and the right of Latvian inhabitants to communicate in Latvian must be guaranteed. Statements like these are usually intended for minority languages, but in fact, over the 45 years of Soviet rule the Latvian language had in effect become a minority in its own country. In order to reinstate its role and functions as the official

state language, legal provisions normally applied to minority languages were necessary. This explanation provides ample justification of why a language law in Latvia is necessary.

The next question is more complicated. How should the law on language in Latvia be formulated to fulfil its functions in support of a de facto minority language on its way to becoming a de jure majority language and at the same time to comply with internationally accepted human rights norms? A chronological look at the law shows a unique progression.

The idea that Latvian should have official state language status was officially first expressed in 1988. In 1989, this idea was strengthened in the Law on Languages, which granted the Latvian language official status and regulated the use of other languages. In 1992, the Law on Languages was amended and Latvian became the only recognised official language in Latvia. Three years went by (1995) before the first draft of the State Language Law was finalised and the status of the Latvian language as the only state language appeared in the title, in contrast to the previous Law on Languages. Another four more years (1999) went by before it was deemed acceptable both for Latvia's situation, as well as for all international requirements and documents that Latvia is party to.

What difficulties were encountered during this period? Firstly, these difficulties were objective. In drafting the legislation, many Soviet period traditions came into play, such as the tendency to regulate and determine everything regardless of individual or private freedoms. Secondly, it was necessary to reverse the deeply rooted theory and practice of the role of the Russian language in Latvia.

The State Language Law thoroughly changed the language tradition created during the Soviet period. This law placed the formerly almighty majority into a minority position. Latvian, whose functions during Soviet time had been degraded to mainly be a communication tool for local inhabitants now had acquired official status; it had become a language that people had to learn and actually take official exams in. At the outset of the drafting process the Russian language was still

looked upon as an important international communications tool, but later it became just another foreign language. Furthermore, it was even demoted to ethnic minority status. While people who spoke other minority languages had previously been labelled as "Russian-speaking", Russian was now on equal par with these languages. Naturally, this caused indignation and dissatisfaction, for – who wants to lose their rights and privileges?

The next question is what did the Latvian State do to guarantee the implementation, enforcement, and sustainability of the Law on Languages and the State Language Law? On the one hand, the strategy was logical and adequate for the situation. In 1992, the Ministry of Justice established a State Language Centre (VVC) responsible for the development of the regulatory aspect of the State Language Law. Transitional regulations were developed for implementing the use of the Latvian language. Regulations regarding Latvian language skills levels and certification were developed, and certification commissions all over the country were set up. The entire nation began a "people's movement", in which just about anybody who knew the Latvian language was teaching it to those who did not. A controlling agency, the State Language Inspection, was established.

In the early 1990's it was estimated that out of the 2,5 million inhabitants in Latvia, approximately 700,000 had either no or very minimal Latvian language skills. During 1992-93, 153,000 people received language certifications (from 1992-2000 the total was 515,000). These numbers are impressive and as a quantitative indicator, it appears that the government's policy was effective and positive. The policy was a model of success and the problem appeared to be solved. Unfortunately, in reality the situation was quite different.

After the mass certifications that took place in 1992/93, there was an emotional backlash. Disappointment by all involved because realistically the situation had changed little, if at all. Those learning the language were disappointed, those teaching were disappointed, and those forming the policy were disappointed. Why?

I must say that the government's strategy for implementing these policies was a desktop strategy, estranged from reality. There were psychological, pedagogical, and, in particular, time factors that were never taken into consideration. Both sides blamed each other for the failures and used antiquated prejudices, myths, and stereotypes as arguments against each other.

The fact that the language learning process is a complicated one, was ignored. It is even more complicated to change a language hierarchy. Given the best of conditions for language learning, time and psychological comfort are required. A person cannot learn a language in 30 or 60 hours, and not just anybody who speaks a language can teach it. Why, then, are there language teachers and special methodologies, if language can be taught by anyone who knows the language? We must also keep in mind that the target audience consisted of people that had never known any other language except for Russian, and that this audience was convinced that the Russian language was an adequate international communications tool as evidenced by their experience living within the Soviet Union. In addition, there was mutual distrust between both sides because of the historical and political baggage each carried. The distrust was intensified and validated by the various prejudices, myths, and stereotypes mentioned earlier about each other.

I am convinced that if the State Language Centre had planned to implement its activities over a gradual period of 10-15 years, we would have seen much broader success without the many years of insults and confrontations. If the State Language Centre had communicated from the beginning with the non-Latvian speaking audience, as well as with the international community, this process would have gone much more smoothly. The well-intended State Language Centre (VVC) lacked the psychological sensitivity to successfully launch and complete this extremely complicated process.

In 1994 the Latvian Government understood that in addition to the State Language Centre, another institution must be established. Thus, the government turned to the United Nations Development Programme in Latvia with a request for assistance in drafting and at least initially launching a comprehensive

Latvian language acquisition programme – the National Programme for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT). A national and international task force drafted this 10-year programme in the summer of 1995. The government approved it on November 1, 1995, and in December of 1996 the programme was launched.

How was this programme different from the activities of the State Language Centre? This programme was founded to support government policies and had very different basic principles. The NPLLT was and is founded on the principle of volunteerism and dialogue in compliance with and support of official policy. In other words, there must be dialogue between official policy makers, policy implementers, and the target audience to whom policy is addressed. For a long time in Latvia practices such as engaging the other side and involving them in the process were considered naive and ineffective strategies. Nevertheless, the sustainability of the programme – six years already – has convinced a large portion of the programmes worst enemies.

Let us look at the chronological development of the State Language Law:

Year	Developmental process of the State Language Law
1988	First mention of granting state language status to the Latvian language; establishment of a working group to research legislation; beginning of the people's movement, in which signatures are collected in support of granting the Latvian language official status;
1989	September 29, the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR passes the "Decision on the status of the Latvian language", which states: „1. Recognising that • The Latvian language in the territory of the LSSR shall have state language status; • The development and teaching of the Latvian language shall be provided, its use shall be guaranteed in all state enterprises, departments and organisations, educational, scientific, cultural, technical, health care, municipal services, and other areas; • In contacting state institutions and organisations, citizens shall have the option and shall be guaranteed documents and information in either Latvian or Russian. Federal relations shall take place in Russian. 2. Instruct the LSSR Supreme Council Presidium to draft a bill by January 1, 1989, on the use of Latvian and other languages and to make it available for public discussion, and to submit a final draft for approval in the LSSR Supreme Council."

1989	May 5, adoption by the LSSR of the Law on Amendments to the Latvian SSR Constitution and LSSR Language Law (LSSR state language is Latvian. The Language Law regulates the use of the LSSR state language and other languages).
1992	Adoption of the Republic of Latvia law "Amendments and Appendices to the Latvian SSR Language Law", which stabilised the position of the Latvian language and in fact established it as the only official language.
1995	First draft of the State Language Law submitted to Saeima (Parliament).
1998	Amendments to the Republic of Latvia Constitution, Paragraph 4, which further strengthens Latvian as the official language of the Republic of Latvia.
1999	State Language Law adopted.
Aug. 2000	Guidelines adopted for government control of language use.
Nov. 2000	Amendments to these guidelines adopted, which contain language level requirements for various professions.
2002	Amendments and appendices to the Constitution: • Latvian is the working language of the Parliament and municipal governments; • Members of Parliament must pledge allegiance to Latvia, the strengthening of its sovereignty, and the support to the Latvian language as the only state language; • The requirement by MP's to provide evidence of Latvian language skills is lifted; • Party candidates provide their own assessment of their Latvian language skills.

As we can see, it took 15 years to develop the legal instruments for stabilising the official status of the Latvian language while complying with internationally accepted human rights norms. The law in its current version is clear, precise, and functional, but there continue to be difficulties in its implementation. Not all of those who are required to know Latvian at the necessary level are in compliance.

1. Education Law

A law on language can only serve to achieve a certain level of order in the use of languages; education is a much more effective tool in language development. Latvia inherited a strange education system from the Soviet period. On the one side, there was an 11-year-long Latvian school that was based on a Moscow-approved system, as was the case in all Soviet republics. On the other side, as in 1945

the number of non-Latvian immigrants from various Soviet republics increased, a 10-year-long Russian school system was established that was based on Soviet Russia's curriculum and used Russian language scholastic materials. Anyone who did not attend a Latvian school attended the Russian school, regardless of their native language. As a result, everyone was placed under the Russian language umbrella, regardless of native language skills, and the acquisition of Latvian language skills was marginal at best. Thus, there were two completely segregated education systems in place, each with its own language of instruction, but in one country. The segregation of schools was and continues to be a reflection of segregation in Latvia's society.

When the independent nation of Latvia took over control of the education system, it lacked experience in developing its national schools, and it also concentrated all its efforts to rid Latvian schools of the ideological pressures from the Soviet period. In so doing, it almost completely forgot about the so-called Russian schools.

Around 1994, after the confusion of the first years of independence and feelings of insecurity about the future, the so-called Russian schools hoped that nothing was going to change and that the parallel system, with its orientation towards Russia and Russian language, would continue to operate even in independent Latvia: a separate school system, disengaged from the Latvian state and located in a different informational and linguistic space. We must also remember that the stabilisation of the language and education systems in Latvia was and continues to be a politically explosive issue, which is consistently aggravated by Russia who meddles in Latvia's internal domestic politics allegedly in the interests of its ethnic brethren.

Recalling how the State Language Law evolved and recognising the necessity of such a law in order to maintain the Latvian language's status as the only official language in Latvia, it is unacceptable and illegal that a parallel school system exists next to the Latvian school system that has its own language and content.

The first steps to make changes in the education system dates back to summer of 1995, when the existing legislation on education was amended. The amendment stated that starting with the 1996/97 school year, two subjects in elementary school and three in high school must be taught in Latvian. This regulation, along with associated regulations and laws, much like the State Language Law, is a desktop strategy – from the administrative perspective, the legislation is ideally formulated but does not consider the realities.

The reality of 1995 in the education system was the following: Despite the legislation in place regarding language use and language requirements of Russian school teachers, the reality in the State was such that, in 1995, it was rare that a non-Latvian teacher spoke or wanted to speak Latvian in class. Classes with Latvian speaking students were just as rare. This was the Soviet period's inheritance.

In addition, there was not much faith that anything could be changed within the school system. The motivation to learn the language was hampered by old stereotypes, myths, and prejudices against Russians, as many believed that Russians do not want to and never will learn the language. The development and impact of the Education Law cannot be viewed separately from the ethnic political problems, discussions, and differing positions of the times. The atmosphere was further aggravated by lengthy debates over the development of the law on citizenship. The legacy and wounds of the past created new wounds. Latvians debated over the legal or illegal status of non-Latvians residing in Latvia. Non-Latvian residents, who had arrived in Latvia as a result of policies dictated by Moscow, did not even understand what the debate was about. They were surprised to suddenly find themselves in a foreign country, where "no one wants us, and even citizenship, which we are entitled to, is denied us".

These hot debates reached their peak just before the referendum on lifting the "windows" of naturalisation ("windows" were annual quotas for the number of naturalised citizens) in 1988. The referendum resulted in lifting the windows and granting all children born after Latvian independence automatic citizenship. At this point it became clear that the ethnic composition of Latvia will

remain as is and that Latvian government policies must reflect this very important factor. However, seven years had passed since the reestablishment of independence and the changes in ethnic rights and generally in the social, economic, and political environments had not lessened social segregation.

The 1995 amendments to the Education Law mentioned above came as a surprise to the Russian schools. In addition, the politically and historically infected debate about citizenship paralysed the non-Latvians's thought processes. Russian school teachers had low Latvian language skills and wanted to maintain the status quo. For linguistic reasons, they often had difficulty following the legislative process on education; furthermore, they resisted it internally in the hopes that nothing would change. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) was working on a new Law on Education and new regulations for monitoring the language situation in schools.

While the MoES sporadically informed the public of changes in education legislation and disregarded issues around implementation mechanisms, the "naïve and liberal" NPLLT was working in tandem with these changes. Part of the "naïve and liberal" NPLLT's strategy is to follow developments and analyse their impact on the affected target groups to determine how adequately they can actually meet the requirements.

From the very establishment phase of the programme, the national/international task force had developed a programme and a 10-year work-plan that would gradually ensure that 9th grade students of non-Latvian schools entering the 10th grade would be able to speak Latvian well enough to follow the curriculum with minimal difficulties. The plan also intended to ensure that non-Latvian school teachers would be able to teach their subjects in Latvian. Unfortunately the NPLLT's recommendations were not accepted. The NPLLT was forced to play the "fireman's" role for several years to come in order to address the gaps created by sporadically announced MoES regulations and amendments with no provisions for their practical implementation. Only in 1999 did the MoES finally understand that the NPLLT supports government policies rather than acts as a saboteur.

Table 3 provides a diachronic overview of how the NPLLT responded so that non-Latvian schools could achieve compliance with the legal requirements.

Education system reform		NPLLT response	
1995	Amendments to Law on Education which say that starting with the school year 1996/1997 two subjects in primary schools and three in secondary schools should be taught in Latvian;	**1996**	• LSL Teacher trainer training; • LSL courses offered free of charge;
1996 / 1999	Revisions and further definitions of these amendments are made;		• LSL Teacher training; • LSL courses offered free of charge;
1998	Law on Education and General Education passed;		• LSL Teacher training; • LSL courses offered free of charge;
1999	Models for bilingual education approved;	**1999**	• LSL Teacher training; • LSL courses offered free of charge; • Call for course funding by OSCE; • Training of primary school teachers; • NPLLT steering-committee decides that 70 % of course funding is earmarked for pedagogues;
2000	Information booklets together with NPLLT on bilingual education for students, parents and teachers;	**2000**	• LSL Teacher training; • primary school teacher training; • bilingual teaching methodology teacher training; • LSL courses offered free of charge, 70 % of course funding earmarked for pedagogues; • Information booklets (together with MoES) and seminars for parents on the benefits of bilingual education; • Special teaching materials for bilingual teaching programmes;

2004	Start secondary school transition in grade 10 with 60* % of subjects taught in Latvian;		Continuation of teacher training and LSL courses as long as needed and funding available;
2007	Exams in Latvian;		

* During the months of drafting this article the negotiations of the percentages of Latvian respectively Russian (minority language) instructed subjects has been moving between 80-20 to 60-40 percent which shows the openness and dynamics of the reform process.

Once again, analysing the development and implementation of the new education system (including its so-called bilingual education programmes), despite some stumbling blocks in implementation, it is a good proposal. The bilingual education system gives Russians and other minority ethnic groups the opportunity to receive the government's general education programme, learn the official state language, and at the same time learn one's own native language and culture. At the moment the discussion revolves around what will happen in high school grades 10-12. The original law states that in 2004, instruction in grade 10 will take place only in Latvian, and in 2007 all final exams in 12th grade will be in Latvian. The Ministry of Education and Science has already retracted its version of the Education Law that after the 10th grade all classes will be held entirely in Latvian. For the moment the debates are about the language proportions and which subjects to teach in which language. Despite the defects in the education reform process, the proposal is generous even from an international point of view.

Nevertheless, there is resistance to this law, particularly regarding the strengthening of the Latvian language in high schools. The issue is highly politicised, parents are provoked to complain that parents and children want to keep the Russian language. The opposition appears to speak for the parents and expresses that the aparent wish of the parents must be heard and not ignored. Objections abound, such as the fact that for several reasons very good teachers are not able to present their subject in Latvian, that the quality of education will suffer, and

that the children will grow up to be ethnically "half-baked". Arguments such as these, particularly from the teachers, generate counter arguments.

The law states that by December 1998, teachers in minority schools must have attained the maximum level Latvian language certification. Since 1996, the NPLLT has offered Latvian language courses free of charge and has developed teaching materials for their specific needs. Since 1999, 70% of funding for courses is earmarked for pedagogues. Bilingual education programmes began in 1996 and the Education Law was passed in 1998. One wonders if these teachers are really that good if by 2003, they still cannot organise their materials so that they take place in Latvian. For a number of years now, they have even been offered courses in bilingual education methodology supported with Latvian language courses. Every law and programme can always be improved, but Latvia has come conceptually far enough, that the segregated school system can now be merged into one unified general education programme.

2. Law on Citizenship

When the Naturalisation Law was passed in 1994, there were an estimated 700,000 non-citizens in Latvia. At the same time, the Naturalisation Board was established and administrative branches all over Latvia were set up. Unfortunately, despite the NB's operative response, the naturalisation process has still been slow; approximately 60,000 between 1995-2003. Political controversy over lifting or not lifting the "windows" has certainly dampened the atmosphere of dialogue for another 10 years, as have debates over whether or not the non-Latvians who arrived here during the Soviet period are colonisers, or whether or not the decision in 1991 to grant citizenship to all of Latvia's residents should have taken place. The slow naturalisation process is another example of quantitative indicators that do not always reflect the effectiveness of government policy. It sometimes takes many years to correct previously made mistakes.

The evolution process of all three of these laws clearly illustrates a transition from totalitarian to democratic attitudes, and from exclusive to inclusive philosophies. One could also describe the evolution and implementation of these laws as a social integration process.

3. Incorporating the concept of integration into the State administration system

The word "integration" was considered taboo back in 1996, but since then it has become an integral element of the Latvian government. Latvia has an Integration Programme, an Integration Department at the Ministry of Justice, an Integration Fund, and at the end of 2002 a ministerial position was established called the Minister for Special Assignments for Society Integration Affairs.

1999	Approval of Society Integration Programme framework;
2000 Nov.	Society Integration Department established at the Ministry of Justice;
2001 Feb.	Society Integration Programme adopted;
2001 July	Law on Society Integration Fund adopted;
2002 Nov.	Minister of Integration appointed;

In late 2002, a co-ordinating and prioritising work group for the national programme "Social integration in Latvia" was established with the task of making recommendations for an integration policy monitoring mechanism. The ambiguity of this mechanism is demonstrated in the programme's section on language.

The main goal of the programme's language and education sections is to have a society that shares one state language – Latvian – but in which minority ethnic groups are given the opportunity to retain and maintain their native language. There were also five sub-goals:

1. A positive attitude toward learning the Latvian language and an increase in the number of Latvian language speakers;

2. Access to the Latvian language to all inhabitants within the country's territory;
3. A unified language certification system;
4. Acquisition of the state language to a level in which Latvia's inhabitants can use it freely as a common communications tool;
5. The ability to receive important public information in an intelligible form, taking into account the current situation and in compliance with the State Language Law.

This goal and group of sub-goals is a concentrated version of all the problems facing government language policies over the past 15 years. It would seem logical that these goals would have been at the foundation of the legislation made at that time. But it did not happen that way, and these goals were introduced only 15 years later. Why? Because, in 1988 Latvia was still deeply in a totalitarianism mindset and under Soviet Russia's influence. Many years and a painful process had to pass before the Latvian government recognised what it means to be an independent country, how to accomplish a realistic situation analysis and a long-term strategy for the future, and how all of that results in democratically formulated laws and solutions.

A much more difficult task is the setting of indicators to monitor progress. Quantitative indicators are relatively easy, but when it comes to qualitative indicators and self-assessments, it becomes much more complicated to measure indicators. Defining accurate indicators is also difficult. Today, the indicators set a few months ago already look inadequate.

The first sub-goal – a positive attitude towards learning Latvian and the increase in the number of people with knowledge of Latvian – was assigned an indicator that measures the number of certifications received by level. Although this is an objective measurement and relates to the number of language speakers at any given moment, it does not tell us anything about the language situation as a whole and the attitude towards the Latvian language. The reasons for acquiring language certification are not associated with positive or negative attitudes (compare with State Language Centre statistics above). On the other hand, the other proposed indicator is

a survey on the use of Latvian and other languages (at work, socially, in public service facilities, on the street, and in government administrative institutions), which will be based on self-assessment. Self-assessment is always a subjective tool that is influenced by many and varied outside factors.

The indicators set for the second sub-goal, which pertains to access to Latvian learning opportunities anywhere in Latvia, is ambiguous given Latvia's situation. Latvia has not introduced a system that would guarantee language learning opportunities for all. Indicators measuring the demand for courses would suggest that there is a need; the number of students enrolled would indicate that these courses are taking place; but there is no indicator that would measure whether or not the courses are available everywhere. Even the indicator on the amount of funding secured for language development and sustainability projects, does not offer evidence of the accessibility of language acquisition.

Sub-group number 3 is much clearer and simpler to achieve – a unified language certification system. This goal can be approached from many sides; all it needs is the political will to truly achieve it. The language levels must be harmonised in all examination centres, schools, Naturalisation Board, and Certification Centre. A nationally standardised exam and its analysis would truly provide a clear overview of progress in language development in Latvia. A good indicator of progress in minority schools would be an analysis of the language levels of army recruits; this is a homogenous group in one age category that represents all of Latvia.

The potential indicators are ambiguous again as we look at the measurement of Latvian as a common communications tool. Bilingual education in this case can only be seen as a promotional factor, not as an indicator in itself.

These examples show that quantitative data, while simple, clear, and statistically easy to process, do not indicate the realistic processes in the country. These surveys are useful only if they are done regularly and are comparative. An example of this is the NPLLT's annual survey conducted since 1996. The survey

"Language" contains several self-assessment questions about attitudes towards language and language use. Over time the dynamics and trends are clearly visible.

The results of the survey covering the period Nov. 2001-Jan. 2002 were analysed during an experts' roundtable. Looking at the comparative aspects of the survey results, these experts (social sciences, humanities, and media representatives) noted that an increase in the skills level and use of Latvian is influenced by many factors, including the quality of language education, psychological barriers, and the influence of the media in Russia. All these factors must be considered when working with teachers and teaching materials, as well as when strengthening ties between the media and target audiences.

Of the survey respondents, 96% of Latvians and 87% of Russian and other ethnic minority groups believe that it is important that all Latvian residents have fluent command of Latvian. This proves that the Latvian language in Latvia has high prestige. Many residents of Latvia are also of the opinion that everyone should know Russian: 56% of Latvians and 83% of Russian. The statistics on opinions about the necessity of knowing English are the following: 80% of Latvians, 64% Russians, 65% other ethnic minorities. These attitudes about Latvian, Russian, and English languages indicate a tolerant attitude towards a multilingual environment.

The most recent survey (November 2002 – February 2003) also shows that the number of people with Latvian language skills is growing since 1996. The most significant change is evident among the number of people with no Latvian language skills, which has decreased by more than 10%. This is a very good indicator compared with other countries dealing with similar problems. The survey shows that 40% of other ethnic groups have good Latvian language skills.

Differing points of departure are used in political discussions. For instance, the decrease of non-Latvian speakers by 10% during this time period can be interpreted either as "only 10%" or as a positive indicator. The negative

interpretation is used to affirm the old stereotypes and prejudices, thus blocking future solutions.

The breakdown of language knowledge by age group shows that there is a correlation between age and self-evaluation – the younger the respondent, the higher the knowledge. Self-assessment of language skills among the 15-34 age group between 1997 and 1999 has fluctuated, but more rapid positive changes are seen since 2000. Overall, since 1997 the number of youth who have a high level of Latvian language skills has grown (from 8% to 17%), and the number of youth who do not know Latvian at all has decreased (from 14% to 4%). The self-assessment of language skills in all other age groups is significantly lower. Therefore, the survey is also beginning to show statistics that confirm the strategy that changes in language are best achieved through the education system.

Since 1996 the use of Latvian in the workplace has also increased. Slowly and gradually the number of respondents is increasing whose native language is Russian but who uses Latvian in the workplace most often (from 9% in 1996 to 26% in 2002). On the other hand, among the respondents whose native language is Latvian, the number has decreased for those who use only Latvian in the workplace (from 78% to 69%). Furthermore, since 1998 approximately 1-3% of respondents each year admit that they use another language in the workplace either most frequently or exclusively. From that we can conclude that the use of different languages in the workplace is becoming more common, which can be explained by globalisation and the international character of economic processes.

Responses to language usage „among friends", „at home, on the street, and in stores" allows us to conclude that the use of Latvian is increasing in the formal environment (workplace), while in the informal environment (among friends and acquaintances), the use of Russian is increasing. This is an indication that Latvian is establishing itself as the official language, while at the same time not permeating

social life - informal situations when language usage depends on the individual's choice and free will.

These factors indicate that the State Language Law is working effectively to establish the position of the Latvian language. They also negate the argument that the law fosters assimilation, an argument often used by the law's political opponents.

The 2002/2003 survey included for the first time questions about certification. These questions seemed important in connection with the high indicators provided by the State Language Centre and as a control mechanism regarding self-evaluation of language skills.

More than half of non-Latvian respondents has taken language certification exams (56%). Certification exams were taken most frequently between 1992 and 1999, the maximum being in 1995 and 1996 (12% of all those who took the certification exam did it during both of those years). Since 2000, activity in certification has decreased and a 5-6% level is maintained out of the total number of those who were certified.

Most frequently, certification is acquired for the second, or middle, level (29%), followed by the lowest (first) level (14%), and finally the third (highest) level (13%). Comparing the self-assessment of language skills and the certification level, it is evident that self-evaluation is closely aligned with the certification level.

This annual survey shows the realistic environment as well as trends and the fact that the nation need not be afraid of asking rational questions. Regularly conducted surveys like these, with simple but socially and politically significant questions is the best monitoring tool to analyse the government's political influence, its strengths and weaknesses.

Attitudinal change towards language is a slow process. Laws can help to navigate and strengthen the implementation process, but they do not produce immediate results. Overly restrictive and repressive laws foster hatred and discomfort, therefore we must seek to achieve solutions that everyone feels comfortable with. Among the main problems in this emotionally saturated process are the subjective factors, people's fears in particular, which are often based on prejudices, myths, and assumed stereotypes. Non-traditional and positive solutions allow people to shake off customary ways of thinking and to be more open to the new. However, dialogue and the inclusion of both sides in the process is of absolute importance, whereas secrecy and impulsive decisions can ruin the best of intentions.

Latvia often emphasises its unique situation and tries to justify requirements of the law based on this uniqueness. The dynamic survey "Language", which has been conducted every year since 1996, shows that Latvia's inhabitants are just like anywhere else. Each person wants to take the easiest and most comfortable road; changes in language usage are slow. The law helps to establish the official position on language, but in a democratic country each person converses in private as they wish. The survey "Language" reinforces the fact that there is no threat from the Latvian government of assimilation or "latvianisation" of ethnic minorities.

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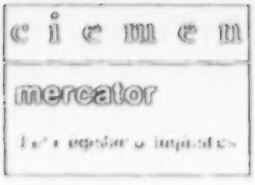

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